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Federal Policies for Women in Industry

By MARY VAN KLEECK

WITH the signing of the armistice, women in industry assumed a position in the public mind radically different from their status two weeks earlier. Two weeks before, government officials, employers, the wives, mothers and friends of soldiers and all the rest of the general public were showing lively interest in persuading women to undertake new occupations in order to release men for the war and to serve with adequate supplies those already at the front. With peace in sight the change seemed to be swift and radical. The question heard most frequently was whether women would now retire from industry. At least one central labor union passed a resolution calling upon women to give up their positions in order that there might be place for returning soldiers. For the moment it seemed as though the remarkable recognition of the importance of women's work in the war was leaving no permanent impression. The old idea that their position in industry was a transient one was now uppermost in the public mind with the added strength of a patriotic appeal to recognize the right of the soldier to his job. The issue thus raised cannot be settled in a few weeks. About the answer to it will center the policies to be adopted by federal and state agencies and by those voluntary associations of employers and workers through which standards governing the employment of women are established.

No wise policy for the period of readjustment can be developed without clear realization of the position of women in industry during the war and the lessons for industry which the war taught. The outstanding fact was the change in attitude toward the work which women could do. Illustrations of their new occupations occur readily to mind. They have been conductors on street cars, elevator operators, taxicab drivers, railroad employes in a variety of occupations and machine operators in branches of the machinists' trade usually considered men's work. It is not to be forgotten that before the war there were very few large industries in the country in which there were not some women employed, so that the change was not so much the work which they did as the

attitude of employers and the public toward it. As the war went on it was expected of the progressive employer that he would find in his organization as many places as possible for women, and the space given in magazines and newspapers to descriptions of the successful employment of women in unusual work gave evidence of the keen interest in breaking down barriers.

With the employment of women in new positions and the necessity for keeping production at its normal level, experience very soon taught that there were conditions which made for the effective employment of women and that there were conditions which put obstacles in the way of their producing satisfactory results. This fact led to the organization of agencies in the federal government to study the conditions of women's employment and to advise the industries regarding hours, wages and proper working environment. The Ordnance Department, faced with an enormous production program, organized as part of its Industrial Service Section a women's branch with representatives in every district office of the department and in the arsenals employing women. The U. S. Railroad Administration established a women's section in its Labor Division. With the organization of the War Labor Administration, established by appropriation from Congress early in the summer of 1918, the Woman in Industry Service began its work as part of the Department of Labor. Its function was to advise the Secretary of Labor on all matters affecting the employment of women. As the secretary had been designated by the President as the Labor Administrator, to develop consistent national policies for labor during the war, this position of the Woman in Industry Service was an important one. The Woman in Industry Service was also represented on the War Labor Policies Board, organized to represent those departments of the government concerned with production for the war, and concerned therefore with labor problems as a fundamental aspect of production.

Several different statements of standards which should govern the employment of women were issued by various agencies associated in the War Labor Administration, and these formed for the first time a definition of the policy of the federal government. General Orders No. 13 by the Chief of Ordnance, which were issued simultaneously by the Quartermaster General as sugges-

tions to manufacturers working on contracts for those departments and to plants under the control of the government, declared that the eight-hour day, prohibition of night work, one day of rest in seven, a minimum wage based on the cost of living, and equal pay for women doing the same work as men, were the "mechanisms of efficiency." Similar conditions were urged by the Committee on Women in Industry appointed by the Committee on Labor of the Advisory Commission of the Council of National Defense. The U. S. Railroad Administration also adopted the principle of equal pay for equal work. In the statement of national policies which should underlie industrial relations during the war, formulated by the War Labor Conference Board and confirmed by the President when the War Labor Board was appointed, it was stated that "if it shall become necessary to employ women on work ordinarily performed by men, they must be allowed equal pay for equal work and must not be allotted tasks disproportionate to their strength." At the same time all of the other principles laid down by this board, such as the right to collective bargaining, applied also to women workers.

The great gain in this consensus of opinion of the various federal agencies rests upon the fact that the statements were issued when the whole energy of the country was concentrated upon production. Standards for which the labor movement and those public-spirited citizens interested in labor legislation had struggled for many years, thus during the stress of war received the sanction of the federal government as conditions essential to satisfactory production.

The means of enforcement were found in the two-fold relation of the government to industry, first as an employer of labor in government-owned plants, and second as the largest purchaser of the products of industry during the war. Certain provisions regarding labor conditions were written into the contracts. Early in the war the contracts with the Quartermasters Department contained clauses prohibiting the giving out of army clothing to be made or finished in tenements. One of the first acts of the War Labor Policies Board was its recommendation that the provisions of the Federal Child Labor Law, which had recently been declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, should be written into contracts of all the producing departments repre-

sented in the board. Shortly afterward a clause requiring full compliance with state labor laws was added to the contracts and at the same time officials of state departments of labor were deputized by the Secretary of War, the Secretary of the Navy, the Director of the Shipping Board and the Director of the Housing Corporation to coöperate with federal agencies in enforcing this contractual obligation.

It should be noted that the contracts never contained all of the provisions included in the standards issued by the various government departments for the employment of women. For example, the principle of the same wage for the same work was not included as a contractual obligation. From the point of view of enforcement the significant fact in the conditions of women's work during the war was the insistence of the federal government upon the observance of state labor laws. In its statement of policy the federal government went much further and laid the basis for high standards in state labor legislation.

Immediately after the signing of the armistice, the relation of the federal government to labor conditions changed, since its power of enforcement resting on its contracts with industry was decreased with the curtailment of contracts. For women workers, therefore, the problem during the period of readjustment is to find new means of enforcement of standards which have received such authoritative sanction from the nation at war. The agencies to be relied upon now include the states, through labor legislation and through vocational training; the industries, through the voluntary adoption of high standards of labor conditions in shop organization; and working women themselves, through the strengthening of collective action by them. Clearly, the three groups will need the leadership of federal agencies since in peace no less than in war the problems of labor are questions of national importance.

Within a month after the signing of the armistice the Woman in Industry Service of the Department of Labor with the approval of the Secretary of Labor issued the following statement of standards which should be a guide in the employment of women after the war. The statement is based on the experience of the nation during the war. It has been endorsed by the War Labor Policies Board.

Standards Recommended for the Employment of Women

(In the following outline the word "shall" and the darker type indicate those provisions which are of the most vital importance.)

I. HOURS OF LABOR

1. **DAILY HOURS.** No Woman Shall Be Employed or Permitted to Work More Than Eight Hours in Any One Day or Forty-Eight Hours in Any One Week. The Time When the Work of Women Employes Shall Begin and End and the Time Allowed for Meals Shall Be Posted in a Conspicuous Place in Each Work Room and a Record Shall Be Kept of the Overtime of Each Woman Worker.

2. **HALF-HOLIDAY ON SATURDAY.** Observance of the half-holiday should be the custom.

3. **ONE DAY OF REST IN SEVEN.** Every Woman Worker Shall Have One Day of Rest in Every Seven Days.

4. **TIME FOR MEALS.** At Least Three-Quarters of an Hour Shall Be Allowed for a Meal.

5. **REST PERIODS.** A rest period of ten minutes should be allowed in the middle of each working period without thereby increasing the length of the working day.

6. **NIGHT WORK.** No Woman Shall Be Employed Between the Hours of Ten P.M. and Six A.M.

II. WAGES

1. **EQUALITY WITH MEN'S WAGES.** Women Doing the Same Work as Men Shall Receive the Same Wages with Such Proportionate Increases as the Men Are Receiving in the Same Industry. Slight changes made in the process or in the arrangement of work should not be regarded as justifying a lower wage for a woman than for a man unless statistics of production show that the output for the job in question is less when women are employed than when men are employed. If a difference in output is demonstrated, the difference in the wage rate should be based upon the difference in production for the job as a whole and not determined arbitrarily.

2. **THE BASIS OF DETERMINATION OF WAGES.** Wages Should Be Established on the Basis of Occupation and Not on the Basis of Sex. The Minimum Wage Rate Should Cover the Cost of Living for Dependents and Not Merely for the Individual.

III. WORKING CONDITIONS

1. **COMFORT AND SANITATION.** State labor laws and industrial codes should be consulted with reference to provisions for comfort and sanitation. Washing facilities, with hot and cold water, soap and individual towels, should be provided in sufficient number and in accessible locations to make washing before meals and at the close of the work day convenient. Toilets should be separate for men and women, clean and accessible. Their numbers should have a standard ratio to the number of workers employed. Workroom floors should be kept clean. Dressing rooms should be provided adjacent to washing facilities, making possible change of clothing outside the workrooms. Rest rooms should be provided. Lighting should be arranged so that direct rays do not shine into the workers' eyes. Ventilation should be adequate and heat sufficient. Drinking water should be cool and accessible with individual drinking cups or bubble fountain provided. Provision should be made for the workers to secure a hot and nourishing meal eaten outside the workroom, and if no lunch rooms are accessible near the plant, a lunch room should be maintained in the establishment.

2. **POSTURE AT WORK.** Continuous standing and continuous sitting are both injurious. A seat should be provided for every woman employed and its use encouraged. It is possible and desirable to adjust the height of the chairs in relation to the height of machines or work tables, so that the worker may with equal convenience and efficiency stand or sit at her work. The seats should have backs. If the chair is high, a foot rest should be provided.

3. **SAFETY.** Risks from machinery, danger from fire and exposure to dust, fumes or other occupational hazards should be scrupulously guarded against by observance of standards in state and federal codes. First aid equipment should be provided. Fire drills and other forms of education of the workers in the observance of safety regulations should be instituted.

4. **SELECTION OF OCCUPATIONS FOR WOMEN.** In determining what occupations are suitable and safe for women, attention should be centered especially on the following conditions which would render the employment of women undesirable if changes are not made:—

A. Constant standing or other postures causing physical strain.

B. Repeated lifting of weights of 25 pounds or over, or other abnormally fatiguing motions.

C. Operation of mechanical devices requiring undue strength.

D. Exposure to excessive heat,—that is, over 80 degrees, or excessive cold,—that is, under 50 degrees.

E. Exposure to dust, fumes, or other occupational poisons without adequate safeguards against disease.

5. **PROHIBITED OCCUPATIONS.** Women Must Not Be Employed in Occupations Involving the Use of Poisons Which Are Proved to Be More Injurious to Women Than to Men, Such as Certain Processes in the Lead Industries. Subsequent rulings on the dangerous trades will be issued.

6. **UNIFORMS.** Uniforms with caps and comfortable shoes are desirable for health and safety in occupations for which machines are used or in which the processes are dusty.

IV. HOME WORK

1. No Work Shall Be Given Out to Be Done in Rooms Used for Living or Sleeping Purposes or in Rooms Directly Connected With Living or Sleeping Rooms in Any Dwelling or Tenement.

V. EMPLOYMENT MANAGEMENT

1. **HIRING, SEPARATIONS AND DETERMINATION OF CONDITIONS.** In establishing satisfactory relations between a company and its employes, a personnel department is important charged with responsibility for selection, assignment, transfer or withdrawal of workers and the establishment of proper working conditions.

2. **SUPERVISION OF WOMEN WORKERS.** Where women are employed, a competent woman should be appointed as employment executive with responsibility for conditions affecting women. Women should also be appointed in supervisory positions in the departments employing women.

3. **SELECTION OF WORKERS.** The selection of workers best adapted to the requirements through physical equipment and through experience and other qualifications is as important as the determination of the conditions of the work to be done.

VI. COÖPERATION OF WORKERS IN ENFORCEMENT OF STANDARDS

1. The Responsibility Should Not Rest Upon the Management Alone to Determine Wisely and Effectively the Conditions Which Should Be Established. The Genuine

Coöperation Essential to Production Can Be Secured Only if Definite Channels of Communication Between Employers and Groups of Their Workers are Established. The Need of Creating Methods of Joint Negotiation Between Employers and Groups of Employees is Especially Great in the Light of the Critical Points of Controversy Which May Arise in a Time Like the Present. Existing Channels Should Be Preserved and New Ones Opened if Required, to Provide Easier Access for Discussion Between Employer and Employees.

The new note in this outline is in the paragraph which deals with the basis of determination of wages. The principle of equal pay for equal work is but a partial step. In its application during the war, one employer, for instance, objected to paying women in one department the wages which men in the same position had been earning, while women in an adjoining department were receiving about half as much for work which was different but no more difficult to learn. In the opinion of this employer this indicated that women's rates should be established in the occupations hitherto filled by men. If the principle of equal pay for equal work be as sound as the support of it during the war would seem to indicate, such an instance suggests an anomaly of long standing in basing wages not upon occupation but upon sex. Undoubtedly there will be great differences in wage rates in different processes and in different industries, but the difference should not be due to the fact that certain occupations are filled more largely by women than by men.

The comparative wages of men and women will be the most crucial problem of the readjustment period. As women have entered a wider range of occupations it will be possible for them to become the unwilling competitors of men in lowering standards of wages. Moreover, now as before the war, women are working to earn a living and the facts show that many are also supporting dependents. Low wages for women mean an inadequate standard of living in the families in which they are the chief support. Low wages for women mean a lower wage scale in those industries in which they are entering in large numbers. The upbuilding of the country after the war will depend upon the possibility of maintaining and raising the standards of living. A theory of wages which establishes a lower scale for approximately one-fourth of the workers of the country, that is, the women, is a menace to the standard of living of the country.

The right of the returned soldier to his job is not a labor policy

upon which to build a program for women in industry. It is a matter of the relation between a firm and the soldier, and public opinion has endorsed as fair and just the determination of many companies to reinstate the men who have gone to war. In many instances, however, the former positions of the soldiers are not held by women but by men. This is not a problem of women's work, nor is the position of the woman holding a soldier's job any different from that of a man who has taken his place. For both men and women workers the immediate task is to accomplish the change from a war basis to a peace basis with the least possible unemployment and with the reinstatement of the largest number of soldiers and war workers in normal occupations for which they are best adapted. The task of production ahead is enormous, with the rebuilding of those things which have been destroyed during the war and with the opening up of new markets. This presents, therefore, a task of organization of industry in such a way as to utilize to the full all of the available working forces of the country.

Women before the war have constituted an important part of the working force of the country. If the tendencies clearly reflected in their increasing employment in the century before we entered the war are to be a guide, then the problems of women in industry are evidently a permanent part of the labor problem which the country now faces. The experience of the war gives ground for optimism if out of it can be evolved more effective state action, and most fundamental of all, a new spirit and method of self-government in industry which shall give equal recognition to women workers.